

Message Text

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21

ACTION NEA-16

INFO OCT-01 AF-10 EUR-25 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03

INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-07 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-03

SS-20 USIA-15 OMB-01 SAM-01 SAB-01 NIC-01 IO-14 DRC-01

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P R 220405Z JUN 74

FM USINT BAGHDAD

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1034

INFO AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI

USINT ALGIERS

AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY BELGRADE

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MANAMA

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY RABAT

AMEMBASSY SANAA

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

AMEMBASSY TUNIS

C O N F I D E N T I A L BAGHDAD 0380

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, IZ

SUBJ: UNEXPECTED VISIT OF MICHAEL AFLAQ

KUWAIT PASS DOHA

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1. SUMMARY: SUDDEN APPEARANCE IN BAGHDAD OF BAATH PARTY SECRETARY

GENERAL MICHAEL AFLAQ CAUSING MUCH SPECULATION AMONG FOREIGN AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES. TWO CURRENT EXPLANATIONS FOR HIS VISIT ARE THAT: (1) HE HAS COME TO MEDIATE A SERIOUS RIFT IN IRAQI WING OF BAATH; AND (2) HE HAS COME TO GIVE HIS IDEOLOGICAL BLESSING TO A FUNDAMENTAL SHIFT IN IRAQ FOREIGN POLICY. FOR WHATEVER REASONS, HIS PRESENCE HERE IS OF SIGNIFICANCE TO FUTURE COURSE OF EVENTS IN IRAQ AND POSSIBLY IN MIDDLE EAST.

2. ARABIC AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE PRESS JUNE 19 GAVE PROMINENT COVERAGE TO ARRIVAL OF LEGENDARY SYG OF BAATH PARTY MICHAEL AFLAQ. HE HAS NOT BEEN IN IRAQ SINCE 1963 ON OCCASION OF FIRST BAATH COUP HERE. HE IS BEING GIVEN EVERY DEFERENCE AND IS RESIDING AT PRESIDENTIAL PALACE. HIS INITIAL MEETING WITH PRESIDENT BAKR ON JUNE 18 WAS DESCRIBED AS CALL BY BAKR ON AFLAQ, AND AFLAQ RETURNED CALL ON JUNE 19. THERE HAS BEEN NO PRESS COMMENT AND NO INDICATIONS OF SUBJECTS DISCUSSED BY AFLAQ AND BAKR.

3. LOCAL OBSERVERS ARE ATTRIBUTING IMPORTANCE TO FACT ASSISTANT SECRETARY GENERAL SHIBLY AL-AYSAMI WAS NOT AT AIRPORT TO GREET AFLAQ AND HAS SUBSEQUENTLY BEEN CONSPICUOUS BY HIS ABSENCE. THIS HAS GIVEN RISE TO SPECULATION THAT THERE IS SERIOUS INTERNAL RIFT WITHIN IRAQI WING OF BAATH PARTY AND THAT AFLAQ HAS BEEN ASKED TO MEDIATE. ACCORDING UNIT LOCALS, THIS THEORY IS WIDELY ACCEPTED BY IRAQIS.

4. SOME OF FOREIGN DIPLOMATIC COMMUNITY BELIEVE, HOWEVER, THAT AFLAQ'S VISIT IS CONNECTED WITH IRAQ'S STANCE IN THE ARAB WORLD FOLLOWING EGYPTIAN AND SYRIAN DISENGAGEMENT AGREEMENTS. FRENCH AMBASSADOR CERLES AND EGYPTIAN COUNSELOR BARAKA IN SEPARATE CONVERSATIONS WITH ME BOTH PUT THIS INTERPRETATION ON VISIT. IN THEIR VIEW, IRAQ HAS BECOME INCREASINGLY ISOLATED FROM REST OF ARAB WORLD SINCE IT IS ONLY MAJOR COUNTRY, WITH EXCEPTION UNRELIABLE LIBYA, THAT CONTINUES TAKE EXTREME MILITANT POSTURE, INCLUDING REJECTION SCR RES 242, AGAINST ANY ARAB-ISRAEL SETTLEMENT EXCEPT ON COMPLETELY ARAB TERMS. NOW IRAQI LEADERSHIP HAS DECIDED TI MUST ACCOMMODATE TO NEW REALITIES IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND HAS CALLED IN CHIEF BAATH IDEOLOGUE TO ADVISE ON HOW THIS SHIFT CAN BEST BE PRESENTED AND TO PUT HIS BLESSING ON THE MAJOR CHANGE IN POLICY. IN
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FURTHER SUPPORT THIS LINE OF REASONING, BARAKA THEORIZED THAT VICE PRESIDENT SADAM HUSSEIN'S RECENTLY COMPLETED OFFICIAL VISIT TO YUGOSLAVIA WAS FOR SAME GENERAL PURPOSE - I.E. TO GET TITO'S ADVICE AND ASSISTANCE ON BEST WAY TO EFFECT POLICY CHANGE.

5. COMMENT: AS IS CASE WITH MANY FOREIGN OBSERVERS HERE, MY FEEL FOR THE MYSTERIOUS INNER WORKINGS OF THE BAATH PARTY

IS LIMITED AND I FIND IT DIFFICULT TO ASSESS PROBABILITY THAT AFLAQ IS HERE ON INTERNAL PARTY BUSINESS. I WOULD LIKE TO BELIEVE THAT AFLAQ'S PRESENCE FORESHADOWS A DRAMATIC SHIFT IN IRAQ'S POLICY IN THE DIRECTION OF ACCEPTING THE DISENGAGEMENT AGREEMENTS AND DRAWING CLOSER TO CAIRO AND DAMASCUS. AN OBVIOUS CLUE TO WATCH FOR IN THIS CONNECTION WOULD BE INDICATIONS IN COMING WEEKS OF IRAQI WISH TO NORMALIZE RELATIONS WITH U.S.

6. COMMENT: MY TENTATIVE CONCLUSION, BASED ON LITTLE BESIDE INSTINCTS, IS THAT AFLAQ IS IN FACT HERE ON INTERNAL, RATHER THAN INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS, ALTHOUGH IT COULD OF COURSE BE A COMBINATION OF THE TWO. IN ANY CASE, THERE IS NO DOUBT IN MY MIND THAT AFLAQ'S VISIT IS A SIGNIFICANT EVENT, THE RESULTS OF WHICH WILL BEAR WATCHING.
GATCH

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